

Partnership aims to merge business, arts Cultural Collaborative blending the two to enhance lives.

Chuck McCollough EXPRESS-NEWS STAFF WRITER

Publication Date : September 22, 2004

Culture and art often are considered special interests of the affluent, but both are part of a larger "**creative economy**" that benefits all San Antonians and should be available all over town. That's the key message coming from the Cultural Collaborative, a group working to create "a community partnership to enhance San Antonio's arts and cultural resources and position the city for greater economic investment."

The effort to blend art and economic development is being pushed by two city departments - the Office of Cultural Affairs and the Economic Development Department.

"We are working on an economic impact study that shows how the **creative economy** relates to and benefits the overall San Antonio **economy**," said Felix Padron, Office of Cultural Affairs director.

Padron said the **creative economy** is more than the traditional art and culture disciplines and includes architecture, graphic design and entertainment.

"Collectively," he said, "the **creative** disciplines form the critical mass for economic development." A Cultural Collaborative public input meeting for residents in Districts 9 and 10 was held Sept. 2 at MacArthur High School. It was the fifth in a series of meetings around town.

A final, citywide town hall meeting will be held 5:30-7:30 p.m. Oct. 18 at San Antonio College's McAllister Fine Arts Center, 1300 San Pedro Ave. Input from all of the community meetings will be used to help develop an action plan that will be presented to City Council in January.

"This (the Cultural Collaborative) is about strengthening the arts and culture in San Antonio and uniting the public and private sectors in that effort," said Jerry Allen, a cultural planning consultant, during the meeting at MacArthur.

He said public meetings and focus groups have allowed the Cultural Collaborative planning process to receive input from hundreds of people.

A key goal of the collaborative, officials said, is to expand the arts beyond downtown and more evenly around San Antonio so they are accessible to a greater number of people.

But the effort faces funding cutbacks and infighting for those funds among local art groups, said Carol Rodriguez, another consultant at the meeting.

She said people attending the MacArthur meeting voiced many of the same concerns and ideas heard at other Cultural Collaborative meetings around town.

"A variety of people (at the MacArthur meeting) voiced support for ways to help individual artists and talked about how we can increase that support," she said, adding that the Office of Cultural Affairs will continue to gather public input.

"There will be a telephone survey done to get still more public feedback," she said.

A vision statement for the collaborative focused on a number of areas, including advocacy and outreach, **creative** individuals, cultural equity, resources, education and vital neighborhoods. A key goal of the collaborative is to encourage the use of art in the education process, not only for students in school but for the community to have access to art through schools.

The vision statement said neighborhoods could benefit from a stronger community arts and culture program.

It defines vital neighborhoods as "strong neighborhoods that possess resources and facilities to permit arts and culture to reinforce community interaction, tradition and pride through a diverse program of performances, exhibitions and festivals."

cmcc@express-news.net